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Importance of a Hospitality Mindset: Patient Satisfaction in Hospitals

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Patient Satisfaction in Hospitals

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Abstract

For the last several years, the incorporation of hospitality has been a growing trend when for the healthcare industry. Traditionally, a hospital is viewed as an uncomfortable place to be for patients, so increasing the level of a hospitality-like atmosphere/environment has become important for patient satisfaction. “With the ever-growing choices for medical care, hospitals are having to incorporate a hospitality industry influenced atmosphere to attract and retain patients. Changes include physical and atmospheric design and better social standards when it comes to the care of the patient (Suess, 2018).”

Research provides several ideas for how and what to implement a hospitality environment in healthcare, specifically hospitals. Research also includes both patient and employee surveys that present various factors that could be implemented to ensure patient satisfaction is increased. This paper will examine the importance of a hospitality mindset in hospitals as well as how some of the hospitality industry’s practices/influences can increase patient satisfaction.

Keywords Hospitality, Hospitals, Patient Satisfaction, Healthcare

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Introduction

When thinking about or discussing healthcare, the hospitality industry is usually not the first thing to come to mind. However, in more recent years, healthcare systems, such as the Mayo Clinic, are learning the importance of incorporating hospitality practices to improve the patient experience (PE). The adaptation of a hospitality-oriented patient experience (HOPE) is one example of incorporating the hospitality industry within healthcare (Hunter-Jones, 2020). Similarities between hotels and hospitals include 24/7 services such as maintenance, foodservice, and housekeeping. Demand fluctuation, the various patient//guest types, and overall service experience also keep the two industries paralleled (Severt, 2008).

Hospitality is defined as “receiving and hosting customers, visitors and foreigners with cordiality and good reputation” or “providing accommodation and / or food services to persons who are away from home (Paraschivescu, 2011).” Even further, healthcare hospitality is defined as the “level of meeting the consumers’ expectation of the produced goods and services (Unurlu, 2019).” These definitions, along with patient expectations, help to guide hospital administration and management on how and what to improve when it comes to patient satisfaction. Through various literature reviews, we learn the importance of implementing a hospitality mindset to increase patient satisfaction in hospitals as well as hospitality practices on how to achieve patient expectations.

Additionally, creating an experience that is satisfactory for the patient will lead to better competitive advantage of the provider; satisfied patients are, in turn, loyal customers. With changes in employer health coverage and a new competitive environment giving people more

choices in the doctors and hospitals they can use, it has become increasingly important for healthcare providers to ensure patient-consumers are satisfied with their care so they return to receive services (Suess, 2018).”

Literature Review

Through research, several methods can be used to integrate a hospitality mindset in a hospital so that patients can have a greater satisfaction about their experience. A hospital provides a perfect example of the idea of a host//guest relationship. This type of relationship eludes a hospitality mindset by meeting expectations of patients(guests) with both welcoming attitudes and overall environment (Severt, 2008). One method on achieving a welcoming attitude is through emotional connections. These are needed to achieve a high level of patient satisfaction. “It is when a carer shows compassion, sometimes in the smallest of acts, that not only does the patient feel cared for, but the health care professional may also feel more positive within themselves (Kelly, 2016).” An emotional connection would fall under personal hospitality, one of three levels of hospitality that can be found in a hospital. The other two levels are public and therapeutic which include politeness and ethics/morals, respectively (Kelly, 2016).

The use of a five-dimensional service quality to obtain a high level of patient satisfaction is another method used to integrate hospitality in hospitals. The five qualities are physical infrastructure, provider-patient interactional, administrative, medical care, and nursing care (Jameel, 2019). However, sentimental value needs to be reached for patient satisfaction as well as the understanding of the intentional behavior of patients (Jameel, 2019).

The *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, discusses another method of hospitality for hospitals, “patient as customer.” Overall, providing hotel-like amenities such as high-quality linens, gourmet food offerings, and concierge personnel allows patients a better

opportunity for better rest and feeling more like home. Hence, leading to increased patient satisfaction. This aspect, also, if cost-effective, leads to a higher profitability (Suess, 2017).

Intangibles provide another approach in increasing patient satisfaction. The knowledge-based theory uses a firm's (hospitals in our case) unique knowledge through employees. The idea is that knowledge of employees at a given firm (hospital) is what would help the overall efficiency and innovation and provide a better patient experience (Erickson, 2017). Tangibles also provide an approach to service for increasing patient satisfaction. Tangibility can be defined as "the degree to which a product or service portrays its clear concrete image and intangibility as lack of physical evidence. Thus, tangibilizing services acts a critical success path for services (Panda, 2014)." Tangibles are just one parameter for measuring service quality and can be found in the SERVQUAL model when measuring patient satisfaction (Panda, 2014).

Methodology

Patient surveys of varying types were the method of collecting data for patient satisfaction scores. One survey used phenomenology by asking meaningful questions of the patients based on "lived hospitality." Patients that participated in the research had to stay in the hospital a minimum of three days, however, to have experienced "lived hospitality (Kelly, 2016).

Standardized nationally, the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) is the first survey where patients can voice their perspectives on hospital satisfaction and care. This survey provides a mean of communication as to what patients found important. For example, hospital lobbies are not particularly an area of focus, unlike hotel lobbies (Wu, 2013).

The use of the SERVQUAL model to determine the level of patient satisfaction brings attention to tangibility. It also encompasses service quality parameters to include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Panda, 2014).

Findings

Increased patient satisfaction can be contributed to many factors. Implementing hotel-like features such as enhanced room amenities, better food quality, adding libraries and community spaces are proving an improved hospital experience. Allowing staff to be specially trained in providing a better hospitality-like experience has also proven to be positive (Wu, 2013). It is even becoming more common for hospitals to employ staff with titles such as Hospitality Relations Manager. Along with titles, one particular hospital implemented a hospitality centric philosophy, which provides a level of service that matches the level one would expect from a hotel (Severt, 2008).

The service quality theory is what was most common amongst the research found on increasing patient satisfaction. Intangibility and tangibility are two issues in the attributes of service quality. Both provide insight on factors that patients deem necessary for a high-level of satisfaction and an overall successful experience. Together, expected quality (image, needs/values, ect.) and experienced quality (technical and functional) equal a total perceived quality (Panda, 2014).

To measure the service quality degree, the SERVQUAL model was used. Through this model, it can be found that customers base their level of quality on the actual service given and what was attributed to the service itself. Through Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Route Path Model Analysis, key influencers for satisfaction include tangibility, assurance, and responsiveness (Panda, 2014).

Limitations

Many similarities exist between the hospitality industry and healthcare, specifically hospitals. Many ideas, methods, and factors have been given through research as to what is best when it comes to integrating a hospitality mindset for increased patient satisfaction. Like hotels, location, size, budget, and revenue factors will contribute to what needs/can be done to increase patient satisfaction. What works for one hospital may not work for another, so suggesting just one universal theory/practice is unattainable.

Implications

“Hotels and hospitals share the challenge of designing facilities that are functional, are cost-effective, and promote their organizations' missions. While the consumer's selection of hotel facilities is much more discretionary than that of hospitals, the need to attract revenue; meet HCAHPS standards; and promote positive, patient-centered outcomes is increasingly leading hospitals to consider incorporating hospitality elements in their designs (Wu, 2013).” An exchange from a host to a guest, a provider and receiver interaction, and both tangible and intangible factors being provided to guests (patients) from the provider are characteristics of hospitality that can be classified in hospitals (Severt, 2008).

Conclusion

After much research, the importance of a hospitality mindset to increase patient satisfaction is crucial for hospitals. While considered two different industries, hospitality and healthcare, similarities exist in such a way that creating a hospitality environment in a hospital should be a given. With more choices of healthcare providers, providing a hospitable atmosphere is necessary to entice patients to return when the need arises.

With parallels such as maintenance, housekeeping, and foodservice, the idea of hotel features and amenities being incorporated in hospitals are not far-fetched. Improving bedding/linens, food quality, and employee attitudes (just to name a few), provide the experience that patients and visitors need to feel more relaxed as well as their overall care is important to the hospital staff. A few theories/methods to increase patient satisfaction include five-dimensional service quality, emotional connection, and providing both intangibility and tangibility through service quality can provide means for increased patient satisfaction in hospitals.

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